Divine Rectitude:

OR, A BRIEF

INQUIRY

Concerning the

MORAL PERFECTIONS

OF THE

DEITY;

Particularly in respect of

Creation and *Providence.*

——*Si quis corrigere aliquid volet, aut deterius faciet, aut id, quod fieri non potuit, desiderabit.* Cicero.

LONDON:

Printed for JOHN PEMBERTON, at the *Buck*, over-against St. *Dunstan's Church*, in *Fleetstreet*. M.DCC.XXX.

Price One Shilling.

Divine Rectitude; or, a Brief Inquiry concerning the Moral Perfections of the Deity, &c.

BOTH Reaſon and Religion require, that whenever we think of the Deity, and contemplate his Perfections, we ſhould raiſe our Ideas, and exalt our Conceptions as far as we are able. There is, in this Caſe, ſo vaſt a Diſproportion between the Object and the Faculty, that when we exert our Minds to the utmoſt, and *put forth all our Strength*, as the Son of *Sirach* expreſſes it, *we can never go far enough*; but are forced to fall infinitely ſhort. Whatever therefore is really amiable or excellent, whatever is truly great or good, muſt carefully and conſtantly be aſcribed to the Supreme Being.

Nevertheleſs it may deſerve to be conſider'd, whether, in the Purſuit of this Rule, we be not ſometimes led aſtray, through the Narrowneſs of our Minds, and the Weakneſs of our Conceptions. For tho' we cannot poſſibly err in

aſcribing any real Perfection to Him, who, we are ſure, is poſſeſſed of all that are poſſible; yet the Queſtion is, whether our Ideas and Meaſures of Perfection may not ſometimes fail us, and thereby prove the Occaſions of our diminiſhing what we are endeavouring to magnify? More particularly I would obſerve, in reſpect of God's *Moral Perfections*, how prone we ſeem to diſtinguiſh and multiply them beyond meaſure, and, as I apprehend, without ſufficient Grounds. Unmindful of that *Simplicity* of the Divine Nature, which is itſelf an undoubted Perfection; we frame to ourſelves, inſtead of an uniform Principle of Action, a great Variety of diſtinct Attributes. The Conſequence of which is, not only a Diminution of the great Idea, but an Introduction of divers Difficulties and Perplexities of Conception which would otherwiſe be avoided.

However we may divide and diſtinguiſh God's Moral Attributes, according to the different Effects, Dealings and Diſpenſations reſulting from them; yet in themſelves they ſeem to be but one and the ſame Perfection variouſly exerciſed on different Objects and Occaſions, and in different Caſes and Circumſtances; and cannot therefore, without Error and Inconvenience, be conſider'd as diſtinct Attributes. The Perfection I am ſpeaking of, is that of God's determining himſelf by *Moral Fitneſs*, or acting perpetually according to the *Truth*, *Nature*, and *Reaſons of Things*. His Juſtice, Righteouſneſs, Truth, Faithfulneſs, Holineſs, Goodneſs, Mercy, Long-ſuffering, and whatever other moral Characters may

may be aſcribed to him, do all center in this Idea, and may properly be reduced to this ſingle Principle. They are all comprehended in that *Moral Rectitude* or Righteouſneſs, by which all the Divine Actions are unalterably conducted. Whether God viſit Men in Mercy or Judgment, with Bleſſings or Calamities; whether he execute Sentence ſpeedily, or ſuſpend it for a long Time; the ſame ſacred Rule is equally, and conſtantly, and inviolably obſerv'd by Him.—— It is true indeed, that the Holy Scripture repreſents to us the moral Perfections of the Deity under all theſe ſeveral Characters, Diſtinctions, and Denominations. But I preſume it is only by way of Accommodation to human Language, and human Conception. It aſcribes to Him our Affections, our Paſſions, our Senſes, and even Parts of our Bodies: but yet we do not ſuppoſe, that any of theſe Things are ſtrictly applicable to the Deity; or any otherwiſe than in a figurative and foreign Senſe. In like manner, human Virtues, which are ſo much diverſify'd by the Affections of our Nature, and the Peculiarities of our State and Condition, ſeem applied to the Deity, if not in a figurative, yet in a leſs proper Senſe. I will not preſume to affirm, that it is even an Impropriety to aſcribe the ſeveral fore-mention'd Characters to the Deity; much leſs that they are to be conſider'd in him merely as *analogical*: but I humbly apprehend, that to view Him in ſo various and mixed a Light, is apt to dazzle the Eye, and miſlead the Mind. Whenever we contemplate his Moral Character, we ſhould poſſibly more conſult His Honour, as well as

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our own Safety and Satisfaction, if we conſider'd Him as univerſally influenced and determined by the uniform Principle before-mentioned: If we conceived of Him in all his Proceedings and Diſpenſations, as ever doing what is *fit*; as ever regarding *the Right of the Caſe*, and the *true Reaſons of Things*.

By confining our Ideas of God's Moral Perfections to this Principle of *Rectitude*, we ſhall eſcape many Perplexities, if not many Errors. What more common, than for Men to bewilder themſelves in ſearching for the Boundaries between Divine *Juſtice* and *Goodneſs*? By the one is generally underſtood a Communication of Bleſſings; by the other, an Infliction of Judgments and Calamities. As if God were not equally righteous in both Diſpenſations! If doing that which is right, and reaſonable, and fit toward his Creatures, be Moral Goodneſs in the Deity, as ſurely it muſt; then his Goodneſs is as conſpicuous in one Caſe as in the other.

While the melancholy and the ſuperſtitious ſhrink and tremble at the Apprehenſions of God's *Juſtice*, how apt is the ſanguine and impenitent Sinner to flatter himſelf with I know not what Hopes from his infinite *Mercy*? Whereas if the true Rule and Principle of the Divine Conduct was duly conſidered by them, the one would find no Cauſe for his Preſumption, nor the other for their Fears.

If we attend to this Principle, as far as we are capable of diſcovering the true Reaſons and Relations of Things, ſo far we ſhall clearly know

know how to judge of the Divine Proceedings. We ſhall ſo far learn, what we are to conceive of Him, and what to expect from Him. For ſince God never acts arbitrarily, but always in Conformity to this Sacred Rule; it muſt needs be our wiſeſt and ſecureſt Courſe to turn our Thoughts this way, and inform ourſelves concerning it as far as we are able. In many Caſes indeed we ſhall be at a loſs; as being utterly unable to diſcover thoſe Reaſons by which the Deity is determined. Whenever we find them thus unſearchable, we muſt be content to remain in Ignorance, in whatever Light we conſider Things. It is great Folly and Preſumption to pretend to be wiſe above our Faculties, and beyond what has been revealed to us. But if ſome Things are obſcure and impenetrable, it by no means follows from thence, that we are to ſhut our Eyes upon what is clear and evident. Nor ought we, where abſolute Certainty is not to be had, to neglect Probabilities. We are, doubtleſs, to proceed with great Caution, Diffidence, and Modeſty, whenever the Deity is the Subject of our Enquiries. But under this Guard, neither Reaſon nor Revelation diſcourages our Contemplations. It is the Duty and the Glory of all intelligent Creatures, to ſearch into the Nature and Perfections of the great Creator; and the further Progreſs they make, the juſter Cauſe they find for Love, Wonder, and Adoration.

The natural and eſſential *Differences* of Things neceſſarily conſtitute innumerable different *Relations*; from whence immediately flow thoſe *Reaſons* and Rules of Action which are

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the Basis of all *Morality*. To us, as well as all other rational Beings, the Natures and Reasons of Things are the Foundation of all right and virtuous Action; and therefore must, in ordinary Cases, be plain, and obvious, and familiar to our Understandings. As far as we are capable of Moral Virtue, so far the Reasons of Things must be discoverable by us. And tho' there are infinite Relations, and infinite Reasons well known to the Deity, and altogether unknown to us; yet this need not, nor ought, to hinder us from endeavouring to separate what is plain from what is obscure, and what is probable from what is imperceptible.

Although our Knowledge of the Reasons of Things be thus short and imperfect; yet I am persuaded it is sufficient to lead us to a clear and distinct, tho' not an adequate Idea of the *Divine Rectitude*. And moreover, that this Principle of *Rectitude*, consider'd simply, and in itself, will give more Light to the Divine Dispensations, and the Doctrines of Religion, than when it is resolved and divided into various Attributes; which, by seeming to interfere with each other, are apt to entangle Mens Thoughts, and perplex their Reasonings. My present Purpose being to try this briefly in a few Instances, I shall, without further Preface or Apology, begin with

CREATION.

IT is not to be doubted but the *Intention* of the Deity, in creating the World, was the *Production of Happiness*, or the Communica-

tion of Good. I will not preſume to ſay His ſole Intention; but a principal one without queſtion. It ſeems equally manifeſt, that the *Reaſon*, *Motive*, or *Principle*, by which he was determined to execute this great Deſign, was the *Rectitude* of the Thing itſelf. To communicate Good, is an Action in its own Nature *right*, *fit*, *amiable*, and *worthy*. And this intrinſic Fitneſs cannot fail to influence the Supreme Being, whoſe Moral Perfection conſiſts in directing his Actions by the true Reaſons of Things. I cannot avoid thinking, that the Divine Goodneſs is very much miſapprehended, when it is conſider'd as a Phyſical *Propenſion*, or *Diſpoſition* of Nature analogous to thoſe Affections and Propenſities which He has given us. Such a *Diſpoſition*, as I apprehend, would be ſo far from conſtituting Moral Goodneſs, that it would derogate from it in proportion to its Influence. To ſuppoſe in the Deity a benevolent Diſpoſition *neceſſary* in itſelf, and in its Operations, is to ſuppoſe what is utterly inconſiſtent both with the Perfections of the Creator, and the Obligations of his Creatures. And ſuppoſing it did not neceſſarily produce beneficent Actions, but to be conſiſtent with Freedom and Choice; yet ſtill, according to the Extent of its Influence, it would depretiate good Actions, and detract from the Merit of the Agent.

This will evidently appear, by conſidering and comparing Human Affections and Human Virtues. When a Man is born with an affectionate Diſpoſition, and high Degrees of Benevolence; this, in itſelf, is not *Moral*, but *Na-*

tural Goodneſs; or *Goodneſs of Nature*, as we juſtly call it. If we ſuppoſe another Perſon with lower Affections, and the ſame Abilities, equally beneficent; we plainly perceive the Moral Merit of the former to be leſs, in proportion to the Betterneſs of his natural Diſpoſition. And ſhould we ſuppoſe a Third without any natural Affection at all, producing, from a Principle of Reaſon and Duty, an equal Quantity of Beneficence, it is manifeſt that his Moral Worth would exceed that of the two former in proportion to the Excellence of his Principle.

Unleſs therefore the Moral Goodneſs of the Creator differ in Kind, as well as in Degree, from that of his Creatures; I humbly ſuppoſe it follows, that if His Beneficence be meerly and entirely owing to a Principle of Rectitude and Right Reaſon, it argues much greater Perfection than if it proceeded, either in whole or in part, from the Propenſion or Diſpoſition above-mentioned. And if this be true, the Suppoſition of ſuch a natural Propenſion muſt be injurious to his Honour; as leſſening his Moral Excellence, and thereby derogating from his higheſt Perfection. To do Good, ſolely from a Love of *Moral Rectitude*, without any natural Impulſe or Incitement, ſeems to me the moſt perfect Goodneſs that we are capable of framing any Idea of; and as ſuch, ought, I think, to be conſtantly aſcribed to the Supreme Being.

That the Production of Good is perfectly agreeable to *Moral Rectitude*; or, that it is intrinſically *right* and *fit* to communicate Happineſs, I have taken for granted; as being too plain a

Truth to require or admit of a formal Proof. Where there is no Reaſon againſt ſuch a Communication, there is always a Reaſon for it, ariſing from the Nature of the Thing itſelf. Happineſs, or natural Good, would be no Good at all, if it were not preferable to Inſenſibility. Whenever therefore there is no Reaſon to the contrary, the Production of it muſt be better, fitter, and more reaſonable, than the Non-production of it.

But the next Inquiry is, whether this be the only right Intention, the only reaſonable View, that the Deity could have in the Creation of the World. Is this the only End becoming the Rectitude of his Nature, and worthy of infinite Wiſdom? This, I think, is commonly preſumed; but on what grounds I am not able to diſcover. I ſee no Abſurdity in ſuppoſing, that the Creator might have various Ends and Deſigns of which we have not the leaſt Conception. But not to inſiſt upon this, it may deſerve to be conſider'd, whether, within the compaſs of our own Ideas, we may not find ſome other Intention befitting the Wiſdom and Rectitude of the Supreme Being. We ſeem to have grounds for ſuch a Suppoſition both from Reaſon and Revelation.

We find the Scripture referring every thing to the *Glory of God.* We are there expreſſly told, that Men, and by conſequence other Beings, were *created by Him for His Glory.* That *He made all Things for Himſelf; and for His Pleaſure they are and were created.* Theſe, and the like Expreſſions, are ſometimes ſtrained up to very improper Heights; and at other times

explained quite away. I am far from thinking, that either in the Creation or Government of the World, God propoſed to Himſelf the poor Praiſes and Applauſes of his Creatures. Sooner might an Angel propoſe to himſelf the Homage of a Worm. Such an End as this was infinitely beneath the Divine Majeſty. And when we are required to *glorify* Him, it cannot be upon His Account: but partly becauſe it is abſolutely *right* and *fit* in itſelf, and therefore *morally good*; and partly becauſe it is eſſential to our *Happineſs*, or *natural Good*.

Nevertheleſs, I can ſee no Reaſon why the Deity might not propoſe, and ſtrictly intend, that *Glory*, which conſiſts in *His own Approbation* of His Works and Actions. It muſt certainly be always right, always fit, for a Being of infinite Perfection to act in ſuch a Manner as may be moſt worthy of Himſelf, and moſt agreeable to Himſelf. As he poſſeſſes all Perfection, and neceſſarily approves it, He cannot but regard, in Proportion, every Kind, and every Degree of it in the Works of His Hands. It is not therefore to be imagined, that He would omit any thing in the Frame and Conſtitution of the Univerſe that might really add or contribute to its Perfection. On the contrary, He would contrive and form it in ſuch a Manner, that it might be every way, and in all reſpects, as lovely as poſſible in his own Eyes. When it is ſaid, that *God ſaw every thing that He had made, and behold it was very good*; what are we to underſtand by this Goodneſs? Is nothing more meant by it, than the Tendency and Conduciveneſs

neſs of every Thing to the Benefit of Living Creatures? Was not the Whole *made beautiful* as well as beneficial? And did not Order and Regularity, Harmony and Proportion appear quite through the Syſtem?

It is true, theſe Perfections of God's Works are Additions to the Happineſs of intelligent Creatures, and may be conſidered as ſubſervient to that Purpoſe. But ſurely they were produced with a further View. If they have any real and intrinſic Worth, they muſt appear amiable in the ſight of the Creator Himſelf. And tho', before the Creation, He had a clear and full Proſpect of all that *Order* and *Beauty* which were afterwards diffuſed through the whole Univerſe; yet I humbly conceive that, in creating the World, He was under a Moral Neceſſity of ſuiting it to his own perfect Ideas, and the exact Model in his own Mind. He is *of purer Eyes than to behold* Diſorder, and Irregularity; whether Moral, or Natural. And the more we examine His Works, the more Reaſon we ſhall find to conclude, that He would ſuffer nothing to come out of his Hands, which was not agreeable to *Order*, and perfect in its Kind. Not only every Individual is *fearfully and wonderfully made*, but a vaſt Variety of Species are fixed in a regular and beautiful Subordination; aſcending from inanimate and ſtupid Matter to Human Kind, and reaching beyond it higher and further than our Faculties are able to follow them. Nay, it may reaſonably be conjectured, that there are more Orders and Ranks of Beings above us, than beneath us; all contributing to make up

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that Scale, that Syſtem of Creatures, which no Wiſdom leſs than infinite could contrive, no Power leſs than infinite accompliſh.

It may ſafely be preſumed, that the Deity neceſſarily loves *Order*, and abhors Confuſion. Were it poſſible to ſuppoſe that Deformity and Diſorder could be more conducive to the Happineſs of His Creatures, than the contrary; even upon this Suppoſition it ſeems not probable that they would have been ſubmitted to. It is not, perhaps, conſiſtent with the Rectitude of the Divine Nature to ſuffer his Workmanſhip to be thus polluted, even for the Promotion of ſo good an End.——Where and how far theſe Ends do in Fact interfere, is above the Power of Man to determine. I doubt not but God has been graciouſly pleaſed to reconcile, and make them coincident, as far as was poſſible. But it does not appear to me, that the *Order*, *Beauty*, and *Harmony* of the Univerſe are meerly intended in Subordination and Subſervience to the *Welfare* of Creatures. On the contrary, I know not whether the latter be not ſubordinate to the former, and limited by it. That as much *Happineſs* was produced, and provided for, as was conſiſtent with the *Order* and Perfection of the Univerſe, may perhaps be more properly ſuppoſed, than *vice verſa*. —Had the Production of Happineſs been the ſole End which the Creator had in view, it is not, I think, to be doubted, but the utmoſt Poſſibilities of it would have been produced, at all Times, and in all Places. But as far as we are capable of judging from the *Phænomena* within our Reach, this ſeems not to be the caſe. That Scale and

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Subordination of Beings before-mentioned, may ſeem to promote the *Order* and Harmony of the World, more than the *Happineſs* of its Inhabitants. Had their ſeveral Powers and Perfections been more nearly equal, what would have been the Reſult? It ſeems probable that the latter of theſe Ends would have been advanced; and the former obſtructed, if not deſtroyed. Whether ſuch a boundleſs Communication of *Natural Good*, be not alſo inconſiſtent, in ſome caſes, with *Moral Order* and *Rectitude*, will be more properly inquired afterwards.

Upon the whole, if Order, Beauty, Harmony be real Perfections, they muſt, of neceſſity, be not only amiable in the ſight of the Deity, but eſſential to His Nature. He cannot therefore produce Diſorder of any Kind, or be the *Author of Confuſion*. But do we not find many Diſorders and Irregularities in the World, of various Kinds? What Account is to be given of them, conſiſtently with this Principle? Doubtleſs the Creator is not chargeable with any of them. They are all to be attributed to his Creatures; who, by abuſing their Liberty, have not only defiled and deformed the Moral World, but, in ſome meaſure, the Natural. Some Parts indeed of the latter may, through the Imperfection of our Faculties, ſeem to us irregular, which in reality are not ſo. But whatever is really irregular, and out of Order; we ourſelves are, in all probability, anſwerable for it.

Notwithſtanding what has been ſaid concerning this Principle, I am ſenſible that the Reality of it is queſtion'd by ſome, and denied by others.

Order

Order and *Beauty* have been repreſented not as *real* and *abſolute* in themſelves, but meerly *relative* to our Faculties, and as reſulting entirely from the Conſtitution and Accommodation of a certain *internal Senſe*. If this be a juſt Account, the foregoing Obſervations are altogether groundleſs. I am therefore obliged to conſider this Matter a little further.

But firſt I would ask, if Order and Beauty be not real, but relative; if they conſiſt wholly in an arbitrary Agreement between the Objects and the Senſe; what means that wonderful *Apparatus*, that boundleſs Profuſion of Art and Skill, which we every where meet with among the Creator's Works? What means that curious * Contexture, and elaborate Arrangement of Parts? Why are they ſo nicely adjuſted to each other, and all made ſubſervient to the Grandeur and Magnificence of the Whole? According to the preſent Suppoſition, how ſhall we avoid looking upon all this as meer Waſte of Workmanſhip? If there be no objective Perfections, no real Improvements hereby introduced, I am forced to conclude, that a *Chaos* would have anſwered the Purpoſe full as well. For had our ſuppoſed *Senſe of Beauty* been adapted and fitted accordingly, we might have had as agreeable Senſations from the rudeſt Objects, as the moſt finiſhed ones. If an Agreement between Object and Senſe be ſufficient to produce a

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*——Omnes mundi partes ita conſtitutæ——ut neque ad Uſum meliores potuerint eſſe, neque ad Speciem pulcriores.—*Cic. de Nat. Deor. Lib. 2. Cap. 34.*

Per-

Perception of Beauty, it might be fully effected by an Accommodation of the Senſe to any Object. What occaſion therefore could there be to accommodate them to each other reciprocally? Much leſs could it be needful to prepare and compleat all Objects in ſo ſtupendious a manner.

The more I conſider this Matter, the more I am convinced, that the *Grounds* of *Beauty* lie deeper than is here ſuppoſed. That they are not to be ſought for among our *Senſes*, or the *Agreements* between thoſe *Senſes*, and their reſpective *Objects*; but in the *Objects* themſelves, and the *Relations* interceding between them. And by conſequence, that *Beauty* is of an *abſolute* Nature, and a real, *objective Perfection*. The ingenious Author of the *Enquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, tho' he profeſſedly maintains the contrary Opinion, yet has nevertheleſs fixed Beauty on ſuch a Foundation, as ſeems to me entirely inconſiſtent with his own Notion. For are not *Uniformity* and *Variety* real *Relations* belonging to the *Objects* themſelves? Are they not independent on us, and our Faculties; and would they not be what they are, whether we perceived them or no?—And if they have no Dependence on any of our Faculties, much leſs on *Senſe*. However Senſe may convey to us the Ideas of external *Objects*, yet the *Relations* between them no *Senſe* can reach. Theſe are perceived by *Intelligence* only. The Underſtanding is the ſole Faculty by which we are capable of comparing one Idea with another, and diſcovering their real Agreements and Diſagreements. And hence, I preſume, it is, that we

acquire the intellectual Ideas of Equality, Variety, Reſemblance, Uniformity, Order and Proportion. That in conſequence of ſuch Perceptions, our Minds are affected with pleaſing *Senſations*, does by no means prove that ſuch Perceptions themſelves are *ſenſible*. Many other Perceptions meerly intellectual excite Pleaſure; but this *Pleaſure* ſhould not be confounded with thoſe *Perceptions*: And whether it may be conſidered as the Object of ſome correſpondent Senſe, I ſhall not now enquire.

On the foregoing Account we need not wonder at the following Obſervation concerning Brutes, made by the ſame Author. *We ſee Animals*, * ſays he, *fitted for every place*; and what to Men appears *rude and ſhapeleſs, or loathſome, may be to them a Paradiſe*. What agreeable Senſations ſuch Animals may have in ſuch places, I neither diſpute, nor enquire. But it ſeems to me very evident, that Man is the only Inhabitant of this Globe capable of perceiving Beauty. I cannot conceive that † Brutes have the leaſt Idea of it; as having no Faculty by which they can diſcern any Relations at all. However Objects may ſtrike their Minds, ſeparately or jointly, I preſume they are as incapable of *comparing* them, as they are of *compounding*, or *abſtracting*.

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* Vol. 1. Pag. 16.

† Itaque eorum ipſorum quæ aſpectu ſentiuntur, nullum aliud Animal pulchritudinem, venuſtatem, convenientiam partium ſentit. *Cic. de Off. Lib.* 1. *Cap.* 4.

All

All Beauty is Truth, * ſays the penetrating Author of the *Characteriſticks*. But what are we to ſuppoſe is here meant by *Truth?* Only the Agreement of the Object with its proper Senſe? If this be all, I ſee not with what Propriety it can be called *Truth*.——If it be alledged, that *Beauty* is here ſaid to be *Truth*, as the Perception of it requires a *true Taſte*; then the Queſtion will be, what is a *true Taſte?* To call that a *true Taſte* which really ſuits, and correſponds to its Object, is to ſay nothing: for in this ſenſe all *Taſtes* are true. If it be ſaid, that the trueſt *Taſte* is that which produces the trueſt *Pleaſure*; how is the trueſt *Pleaſure* to be diſcovered or determined? If by *Senſe*, we are juſt where we ſet out; ſince nothing is to be found this way, but the Agreement between Object and Faculty. And indeed, while *Beauty* is conſidered as a *ſenſible Object*, I ſee no poſſibility of advancing any furrher.——Accordingly this Author appears ſometimes to have had a further Meaning. In ſeveral places he ſeems to conſider Beauty as an abſolute, objective Perfection, reſulting from certain fixed Relations eſſentially interceding between our Ideas. *True Features*, † ſays he, *make the Beauty of a Face; and true Proportions the Beauty of Architecture.* Agreeably whereto it may be ſuppoſed he would allow, that true Actions and true Affections make *Moral Beauty*. It muſt indeed be confeſſed, that ‡ elſewhere he ſpeaks in a different ſtrain;

* Vol. 1. Pag. 142. † Ibid. ‡ Vol. 2. Pag. 43, & 45.

inſomuch that it is no eaſy Matter to diſcover what was, upon the whole, his Opinion concerning this Matter.

Whatever Diverſity there may be in Men's Taſtes, Fancys, or Perceptions; I preſume the Eſſentials of Beauty are unconcerned therein. Without Order, Symmetry, and Proportion, no Works of Art are, or can be, beautiful; and according to the Degree wherein thoſe prevail, the Beauty of theſe is greater or leſs. Tho' in *Architecture* there are various Orders and Manners, yet *Uniformity* and *Proportion* are obſerved in all: even in *Gothic* Buildings; however they may be encumbered with inelegant Devices, and ill-choſen Decorations. However Men may differ about the Circumſtantials of Beauty, they are generally agreed as to the Eſſentials. And the Reaſon of it is, if I miſtake not, becauſe they are of a fixed, unalterable Nature; that is, abſolute, intrinſic, and neceſſary *Relations*; and by conſequence Objects of the *Underſtanding* only. For tho' the Diſcernment of Beauty is clearer and quicker in ſome Men than others; this is no more than what may be ſaid in reſpect of other kinds of Truth. Experience ſhews, that the ſame Underſtandings which are very apt and quick in learning ſome Arts and Sciences; yet are taught others very heavily, and difficultly, and perhaps not at all. What therefore the Author laſt mentioned calls a *true Taſte*, ſeems to be in reality nothing more than an *Underſtanding* fitted by Nature, and formed by Inſtruction, to perceive and diſtinguiſh the various Kinds of *Beauty*. Nor can I ſee any Reaſon, why a Genius

Genius for *Mathematicks* may not as well be aſcribed to a diſtinct Faculty; as a Genius for *Painting*, *Statuary*, or *Architecture*.

But to return from this Digreſſion, if it be one, to the Order and Beauty of the Creation: Tho' we cannot preſume to judge how the Univerſe appears in the eyes of the Deity; yet, excepting thoſe Blemiſhes which have been occaſioned by the Misbehaviour of his Creatures, it is not, I think, to be doubted, but it is moſt regular, moſt harmonious, and moſt beautiful in his ſight. And ſuch muſt the Plan of it have appeared, before the Creation, in his all-comprehenſive Mind. Theſe Beauties therefore muſt be real, abſolute, and objective Perfections. For whatever the Creator ſees in his Works, or Ideas, muſt actually be in them. What they appear to Him, that they preciſely are in themſelves. It is inconſiſtent with the Perfection of the Deity to aſcribe any of His Perceptions to an accommodated Faculty, or to any thing analogous thereto. Either therefore the Natural and Moral World appear without Beauty to the Divine Mind; or the Beauties which He perceives in them muſt be real and inherent. And if they conſiſt in fixed, unchangeable Relations; they can have no more dependence on any Percipient, than other Kinds of neceſſary Truth. Theſe would be real Truths, and thoſe real Beauties, whether any Being perceived them or no. But, in fact, the Perception of them is as neceſſary as the Things themſelves.

If then *Beauty* be real *Truth*, or founded on Truth, it muſt unavoidably claim the Regard of all

all intelligent Beings: And the more intelligent they are, the more amiable it muſt appear to them. No wonder then the all-perfect Creator ſhould be influenced by it, and ever act with a ſpecial View to it. That He ſhould frame the World in Conformity to its Rules, and *pour it over all his Works*. The Order of the Univerſe may be looked upon as ſacred; and a regular Subordination of Creatures as a neceſſary Perfection. And tho' we cannot determine how far this Principle may be brought, by Divine Wiſdom, to coincide with the former, *viz.* the Communication of Happineſs; yet, I think, there are Grounds to conclude, that neither is entirely ſubordinate to the other. Perhaps neither is carried to its utmoſt extent; but ſometimes, and in ſome caſes, the one ſeems to prevail, and ſometimes the other. However, we find large and liberal Proviſion made in both reſpects; which would ſtill be found much larger, if we did not leſſen it by our own Folly and Perverſeneſs.

Whoever ſuppoſes, that the Order, Beauty, and Harmony of the Univerſe are intended meerly as ſubſervient to the Enjoyments of Living Creatures; will find it difficult to reconcile ſuch a Suppoſition with the Appearances which he meets with. For, to mention nothing elſe, how inconſiderable are the Enjoyments of lower Ranks of Creatures in compariſon of the higher? Had all been created *intelligent*, all endued with the Powers and Faculties of *Angels*; what may we ſuppoſe would have been the Conſequence? In all probability an Encreaſe of *Happineſs*, and

and a Deſtruction of *Order*. Since then this is not the Caſe; may we not reaſonably conclude, that the latter could not be ſo far violated for the ſake of the former? I think it appears from what has been ſaid, that both theſe Intentions are worthy of the Deity; both agreeable to the Rectitude and Perfection of his Nature: but if we ſuppoſe either of them, ſeparate from the other, to have been his ſole End and Motive; we ſhall, I fear, find ourſelves involved in inextricable Difficulties.

If we conſider the *Goodneſs* of God as an unbounded *Benevolence*, prompting Him to produce all poſſible Happineſs; we ſhall perhaps both expoſe ourſelves to needleſs Difficulties, and entertain wrong Conceptions of Him. But if we conſider Him as perpetually acting according to the true Reaſons and Natures of Things, whatever they be; we may poſſibly eſcape ſuch Difficulties, and at the ſame time form juſter Notions of the Divine Nature and Conduct. According to the former of theſe Ideas, that unequal Diſtribution of Good which appears in the World, may be ſufficient to puzzle, and put to ſilence, every Enquirer: according to the latter, it appears perfectly right, and agreeable to the Natures of Things. The Order of the Univerſe requires it; and this, if I miſtake not, is a juſt Solution of the Difficulty. I ſhall leave it to the Reader to apply this Principle, in conjunction with the other, to the ſeveral Queſtions and Difficulties ariſing from the Frame of the World, and the preſent Conſtitution of Things: but a few of the chief of

them will, however, be conſidered under this, or the following Heads.

The principal Difficulty belonging to this Head, which I therefore ſingle out from the reſt, is raiſed from that natural *Liberty* or *Free-Agency* which Man is poſſeſſed of. And the Queſtion is, how it is conſiſtent with the Goodneſs or Rectitude of the Deity, to commit Mankind to their own Cuſtody and Government; and to put it in their power to do much Miſchief to one another, and to ruin themſelves. Why are they entruſted with ſo dangerous a Faculty; which is ſo often miſapplied, and ſo grievouſly abuſed? Now tho' it is confeſſed, that this is the true *Origin of Evil*; yet the righteous Creator is in no degree chargeable with ſuch a Conſequence. It is perfectly agreeable to the *Reaſons of Things*, and by conſequence to the *Divine Rectitude*, to produce *free* Creatures, and join * Liberty and Intelligence together. Both the *Order* of the World, and the *Happineſs* of his Creatures required it; notwithſtanding the ill Effects which may and do flow from it.

I have already obſerved, that the Deity, in creating the World, ſeems to have been, in ſome ſenſe, obliged to frame it after ſuch a manner, as might be altogether worthy of Himſelf; worthy of His infinite Wiſdom, and conformable to the Perfection of his own Ideas. That he could

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* *Some Authors conſider Liberty as a natural Conſequence of Intelligence; but as I cannot perceive any neceſſary Connexion between them, I have laid noſtr eſs on that Notion.*

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not approve his own Work, without regarding and conſulting the *Order* of the Univerſe. How then could that *Order* have been eſtabliſhed, or how the Syſtem of Creatures compleated; if no *Liberty* had been granted, no *Agents* created? Had neither Men nor Angels been *free*; they could have been nothing more than conſcious *Inſtruments*, and intelligent *Machines*. The Scale of Beings would thus have been broken, and vaſtly imperfect. The All-wiſe Governour of the World would have had no other than paſſive Subjects; if thoſe may be called Subjects who are utterly incapable of Obedience. It muſt not be ſaid, that, upon this Suppoſition, they would have been beneath the Creator's Regard; ſince He can neither deſpiſe nor overlook any thing that He has made: but ſurely they would have been far leſs worthy of the Conduct and Superintendance of infinite Wiſdom, than *free* Beings and rational *Agents*. It is in the Government of ſuch only, that the Glory and Majeſty of the Great Sovereign of the World is, or can be, fully diſplayed. Without *Liberty* we can have no Idea of the Divine Adminiſtration, but what is, comparatively, low and little. It is *Liberty* that raiſes it to ſuch a Height of Dignity, Grandeur, and Importance; that conſtitutes the Kingdom of the Univerſe, and renders it worthy of its Infinite Ruler. In ſhort, it is *Liberty* that animates the Creation, and compleats the Order and Beauty of the whole Syſtem.

Is it then to be ſuppoſed, that the Creator could have ſo little Regard to His own *Approba-*

tion, His own *Glory*; as to produce an Univerſe without any *Agents?* To produce innumerable Ranks of Creatures; the higheſt of which were ſo far from being fit for Him to govern, as to be, in reality, incapable of Government? However they might have been directed by *Natural Laws*, there would have been no place for *Moral*; and by conſequence, no room for the higheſt Acts and Employments of Providence.—If *Liberty* be the Origin of *Evil*; it is alſo the Origin of *Good*. If it be the Occaſion of *Diſorder*, it is the Cauſe of *Order*; of all the *Moral Order* that appears in the World. Had *Liberty* been excluded, *Virtue* had been excluded with it. And if this had been the Caſe, the World could have had no Charms, no Beauties, ſufficient to recommend it to Him that made it. In ſhort, all other Powers and Perfections would have been very defective without this, which is truly the Life and Spirit of the whole Creation.

And as Liberty is thus requiſite in reſpect of *Order*, ſo it is in reſpect of *Happineſs*; to which it not only conduces, but is eſſential, ſo far I mean, that no Happineſs can be perfect, or riſe to any conſiderable height without it.—I have already obſerved, and it is moſt evident in itſelf, that without *Liberty* there could be no *Virtue*: which in its very Nature requires and preſuppoſes Freedom of Choice. By ſtrong Inſtincts, Propenſions, and Predeterminations, Men might have been moved any way, and driven to any thing. But ſuppoſing them not *free*, they would have been little more than well-directed Machines. They could not have been Moral Agents,

could

could not have been capable of *Virtue*; which conſiſts, not in being rightly acted upon, but in chuſing and acting what is Right.——And as *Virtue* depends upon *Liberty*; ſo, in a great meaſure, does *Happineſs* depend upon *Virtue*. Had not Men been capable of the latter, they could never have obtained, never have been fitted for high Degrees of the former. The chief Ingredients of Happineſs are only the Growth of this Soil. The pureſt, the nobleſt, the ſublimeſt Pleaſures which rational Beings are capable of, ſpring from Virtue; and are the genuine Fruits, and peculiar Effects of it. That Self-approbation and Conſciouſneſs of well-doing, which inſeparably attend the Love and Practice of Virtue, is a Satisfaction of this kind. It may be looked upon as the Eſſence of Happineſs; as Self-condemnation and Remorſe are the Eſſence of Miſery. In like manner, a Senſe of the Approbation, Eſteem, Love, and Favour of the Supreme Being, which Virtue only can procure; is, or will be, a Source of the moſt exquiſite Delight which the Mind is capable of receiving. As an Apprehenſion of his Diſpleaſure and Indignation will produce the moſt inſupportable Anguiſh.——In compariſon of theſe, and the like virtuous Satisfactions; the higheſt Gratifications of Senſe, and perhaps the very Entertainments of the Underſtanding, may be conſidered as meer Amuſements. That in general the Pleaſures of *Reflection* are, in many reſpects, vaſtly ſuperior to thoſe of *Senſation*; can be denied by none but thoſe who are deeply immerſed in the one, and great Strangers to the

other. And of the Pleaſures of Reflection, the far greater Share entirely depends upon *Virtue*, and directly flows from it. When a virtuous Man turns his Eyes inward upon himſelf, he is ſure to find the pureſt and ſincereſt Satisfaction. External Objects, fair and beautiful as they are, can yield no Proſpect equal to that which he finds within his own Mind. This Object is not only more excellent in itſelf, but is of ſuch a Nature, that the Poſſeſſor can never grow weary of it, or be cloyed with it. It is moreover always ready, always at command; and he enjoys it, without waiting, whenever he pleaſes. In ſhort, Virtue not only exalts and refines the Mind, but eminently bleſſes it; as it yields it thoſe ſerene, ſolid, and durable Joys, which nothing elſe could poſſibly yield: As it brings it likewiſe, in ſome meaſure, to a Reſemblance of that Being, who is ſupremely amiable, and infinitely perfect.

Since then the Reality of *Virtue* depends upon *Liberty*, and the Perfection of *Happineſs* depends upon *Virtue*; it could never be inconſiſtent with God's Goodneſs, or the Rectitude of His Nature, to create Men *free*. On the contrary, whether the Order of the Univerſe required it or no, He might have done this from a Principle of *Benevolence*; as it was neceſſary for the Advancement and Completion of their Happineſs. He well knew that this *Freedom* might, and would be abuſed; but how was this a ſufficient Reaſon for with-holding it? Becauſe ſome Men would make an ill Uſe of this Privilege, muſt not others be ſuffered to

make

make a good one? Muſt ſo much Happineſs be kept out of the World, in order to prevent that Unhappineſs which perverſe and vicious Men would bring upon themſelves?—Surely no Man can prove that *Liberty* is productive of more *Evil* than *Good*. And ſhould this be ſuppoſed true in reſpect of the Inhabitants of this Globe; yet may not the Caſe be widely different in other Parts of the Univerſe? What Reaſon is there to conclude, that Rational Beings in general are as diſſolute and diſobedient as that Race of Mankind to which we belong? On the contrary, there are better grounds to believe, if we conſider the whole intelligent Syſtem, that *Virtue* is far more prevalent than *Vice*; and by conſequence, that the good Effects of the one are greatly ſuperior to the ill Effects of the other.

However, tho' the Difficulties concerning *Liberty* may be accounted for ſolely on the Principle of *Benevolence*; yet this is no Reaſon for excluding the Principle of *Order* before inſiſted on. They ſeem to me, taken in conjunction, mutually to ſupport and ſtrengthen each other. Since the Glory of God required a Production of *Order*, as well as a Proviſion for *Happineſs*; and ſince the Order of the World, and the Happineſs of its Inhabitants both required the Creation of *Agents* or free Creatures; well may we conclude it perfectly agreeable to the *Divine Rectitude* to produce ſuch Beings. Since this Perfection of the Deity determines Him ever to act according to the true *Reaſons* of Things; if the *Order* of the World be ſuch a

Reaſon,

Reaſon, it muſt, I preſume, have its Weight, and be regarded accordingly. How far the one of theſe Principles is limited and reſtrained by the other, and how far either may be ſuppoſed ſubſervient and ſubordinate to the other; are, I think, Queſtions above Human Determination. My chief Aim is to endeavour to ſhew the Convenience and Advantage of conſidering the Moral Perfections of the Deity under the Idea of *Rectitude*, rather than in the various and mixed Light of many diſtinct Attributes. Having attempted to do this in reſpect of the Doctrine of Creation, I ſhall briefly endeavour it in reſpect of the Doctrine of

PROVIDENCE.

CONcerning which, the principal Difficulties ſeem to be, *the Introduction and Infliction of Natural Evil*; and *the promiſcuous Diſpenſation of Good and Evil which appears in the World.* For as to the *Permiſſion of Moral Evil*, it is nothing more than a direct Conſequence of the original Grant of *Liberty*. Men had been created *free* to no purpoſe, if the Uſe and Exerciſe of that Power had not been permitted. If there were wiſe and good Reaſons for the Communication of *Liberty*, and the Production of *Agents*, as I have already ſhewn; the ſame Reaſons muſt hold for their Continuance and Preſervation. And if thoſe Agents continue to be Agents; that is, if they are allowed to *uſe* their Natural Freedom, it muſt be in their power to *abuſe* it; and every ſuch

ſuch Abuſe is *Moral Evil.* In ſhort, it ſeems impoſſible that any Means ſhould be uſed for the effectual Prevention or Baniſhment of *Vice*, which would not be attended with an effectual Prevention or Baniſhment of *Virtue.*

I proceed therefore to conſider the *Introduction and Infliction of Natural Evil*; which will appear either difficult or not difficult to be accounted for, according to the Ideas which we frame of the Divine Perfections. If we conceive the Goodneſs of God to conſiſt in a certain natural *Propenſion*, or *Diſpoſition*, or ſomething analogous thereto; which perpetually inclines Him to communicate Good, and by conſequence to produce throughout the Univerſe all poſſible Happineſs: I can ſee no way at all of accounting for ſuch Evils, as are moſt properly ſo called, and which are moſt really and truly ſuch. On the other hand, if we conſider Divine *Goodneſs* as Divine *Rectitude*, according to the foregoing Explanation; ſuch Evils may not only be accounted for, but appear abſolutely neceſſary for the Accompliſhment of thoſe Ends, which cannot fail to be propoſed by a righteous Governor of the World.

Natural Evils may be diſtinguiſhed into *real* and *apparent*; or, in other Words, into ſuch as are *properly*, and ſuch as are *improperly* ſo called. By the former, I mean thoſe Evils which are entirely of a *penal* Nature. By the latter, ſuch as terminate in the Good of the Sufferer. Whatever has ſuch an Effect, is, upon the whole, not Evil but Good, and ought to be ſo accounted. Natural Evils of this kind are ſuch as either con-

duce to the *Improvement* of the *Virtuous*, or the *Reformation* of the *Vicious*. For I conſider only their Effects upon the *Mind*; and therefore purpoſely omit ſuch Uſes and Tendencies as are of a different Nature.

How the Hardſhips and Diſtreſſes which are incident to Mankind in this preſent State, conduce to *Virtue*, is very obvious. They give Room and Occaſion for the Exerciſe of many Virtues, which could not otherwiſe appear, either to the World, or to the Owner himſelf. Were Men exempted from all Sufferings, how could their *Patience*, their *Fortitude*, their *Reſignation* to the Will of God, be manifeſted or brought to light? In like manner, Opportunities of exerciſing the amiable Virtues of *Humanity*, and *Charity*, are chiefly owing to Adverſity; as it produces and points out the moſt proper Objects. The trueſt and higheſt Proofs that Men can give of their Benevolence to their Species, are comforting the Miſerable, relieving the Indigent, and ſuccouring the Diſtreſſed. From theſe and many other Inſtances that might be added, it is undeniably evident, that the Sufferings of Life contribute to improve Men in Virtue and Goodneſs. Such *Evils* then as theſe, by producing ſuch Effects, loſe their Name and their Nature; and ought to be both called and reputed the greateſt *Bleſſings*.

And the ſame may be ſaid in reſpect of thoſe *Chaſtiſements*, and Corrections, by which Sinners are reclaimed, and brought to a juſt Senſe of their Sin and their Duty. When the Hand of Heaven is upon them, Men are peculiarly diſpoſed to

to *learn Righteouſneſs*. Providential Calamities tend, very powerfully, to ſubdue the Obſtinate, and ſoften the Obdurate: And even the *natural Conſequences* of Sin and Vice are oftentimes inſtrumental in producing the ſame Effect. In all ſuch Caſes, Men's Sufferings are infinitely beneficial; and however grievous they may be for the preſent, are in reality no more *evil*, than a bitter Medicine by which a ſick Man recovers his Health. There is therefore very little difficulty in reconciling ſuch Evils as theſe with the Divine Goodneſs; in whatever Light it be viewed, or however it be repreſented.

But what ſhall we ſay of thoſe Evils which are not only judicial, but ſtrictly *penal*? When, the Meaſure of Men's Iniquities being filled up, they are actually under the Executions of Divine Vengeance. This is ſometimes the caſe of incorrigible Offenders, even in this World. What Account then is to be given of theſe real, abſolute Evils; which not only ſtrike by Commiſſion, but are inflicted as direct and poſitive Puniſhments? How are they conſiſtent with that *Diſpoſition* in the Deity, which is ſuppoſed ever prompting Him to Acts of Beneficence, and Communications of Good? If it be ſaid that they are intended meerly *in terrorem*; how is ſuch an Aſſertion to be ſupported? That they may be, and are, inflicted with ſuch a View, is readily allowed. But is this the ſole Reaſon and Deſign of them? The only Intention befitting the Righteous Governor of the World? I humbly ſuppoſe the contrary. Could we ſup-

poſe but one Moral Agent, one Rational Creature in the Univerſe, and him obſtinately and incorrigibly wicked; it is not, I think, to be doubted, but he would feel the Effects of his Maker's Diſpleaſure. Nay, there are good grounds to believe, that his Puniſhment would be proportioned to his Crimes. This ſeems highly probable on many accounts; and is, if I miſtake not, conformable to the Doctrines both of Reaſon and Revelation.

It is owing, I preſume, to miſtaken Conceptions of God's *Goodneſs*, that Men are apt to conſider Him as incapable of inflicting Puniſhment with any other than the fore-mentioned View. If we attend to the Principle of *Divine Rectitude*, which comprehends all Moral Perfections, and I think exhibits them in a clearer Light; we ſhall find the Deity ever acting, and ever determined to act, according to the *Reaſon of the Thing*, and the *Right of the Caſe*. If then it be *right* and *reaſonable* in itſelf, to puniſh *Wickedneſs* as well as to reward *Goodneſs*; He will aſſuredly do both. If *Virtue* be neceſſarily *amiable* in his ſight; *Vice* is neceſſarily odious. If there be *Merit* in the one, which naturally recommends it to his Favour and Eſteem; there is equal *Demerit* in the other, which unavoidably excites his Diſpleaſure and Indignation. Is it not then as *morally fit*, and as agreeable to the Rectitude and Sanctity of the Divine Nature, to puniſh the one, as to reward the other?

Should God communicate Good, and finally diſpenſe Happineſs to all his Creatures, deſerving or undeſerving, promiſcuouſly and indiſcriminately; how could He be ſaid, upon this Suppoſition, to act according to the true Natures and Reaſons of Things? *Virtue* and *Vice* are eſſentially oppoſite; and therefore it is not poſſible that the ſame Treatment ſhould ſuit the Votaries of each. Between *Virtue* and *Happineſs*, *Vice* and *Unhappineſs*, there is both a natural and moral Connexion. A *vicious* Man cannot, in the Nature of Things, be *happy*; and if he could, the righteous Governor of the World would not finally ſuffer it, becauſe the quite contrary is deſerved. It would appear to Him a direct Miſapplication and Proſtitution of Happineſs, to confer it on ſuch an Object. To bleſs the Impenitent, and Incorrigible, muſt be eſſentially repugnant to the Rectitude and Purity of his Nature. The eternal Reaſons of Things, which conſtitute the ſacred Rule of Righteouſneſs, will not admit of it.

When a virtuous Man hears or reads of a vile and villainous Character, he naturally reſents, and is offended at it. And the more virtuous he is, and the viler the Character is, the higher his Indignation riſes in proportion. This may be looked upon as the Operation of an *Inſtinct*, or *Paſſion*, planted in Men's Minds for ſuch a Purpoſe: And, in ſome meaſure, ſo it is. But it is to be conſidered, that this *inſtinctive Reſentment* is diſtinct from, and ſubſequent to, the *Diſapprobation* of the *Underſtanding*. Vice

neceſſarily appears odious to the *Judgment* of every uncorrupt Mind; and that *natural Movement* which in us follows ſuch a Perception, no way alters or affects the Perception itſelf, which muſt be the ſame with or without ſuch a Paſſion. Tho' therefore the Deity be void of all Paſſion, yet *Vice* muſt be the Object of his extreme Abhorrence. The Perfection of his Underſtanding heightens its Deformity, and renders it infinitely offenſive.——Let us further conſider the Sentiments of a virtuous Man in reſpect of a very baſe Character. He not only perceives it to be very odious in itſelf, but judges it immediately moſt worthy of *Puniſhment*. Let us ſuppoſe the Caſe of ſome Wretch, who has murdered his Father, or ruined his Country, or ſacrificed the Lives of his Children to ſome mean Paſſion. I enquire not what Emotions of Reſentment would riſe in a good Man's Breaſt, upon the firſt hearing or reading of ſuch Crimes. I only ask, how he would judge of them in cool Blood. Could he poſſibly deſire or approve the Impunity of ſuch a Criminal? It may be ſaid, that if his Puniſhment were not neceſſary *in terrorem*, that a good Man would encline to grant him an Opportunity of Repentance and Amendment. Be it ſo. But if it be further ſuppoſed, that ſuch a Criminal is altogether hardened and incorrigible, and that the longer he lives the more wicked he grows; the moſt merciful Man in the World, if it were in his power, would paſs Sentence on him, and give him up to condign Puniſhment. To do otherwiſe,

wiſe, would not be Goodneſs, but Weakneſs. It would be violating Truth and Nature, and acting counter to the plaineſt Reaſons of Things. ——If then the Puniſhment of incorrigible Sinners be *right* and *reaſonable* in itſelf, it muſt be *morally fit* for God to inflict it; and by conſequence it can be no way * unbecoming, but is highly becoming, the Rectitude of his Government, and the Perfection of his Providence. Tho' we are ſure it is more agreeable to the Deity to ſpare than to puniſh, whenever the Caſe will admit of it; yet whenever it will not, He certainly puniſhes, becauſe puniſhing is then *right*, and ſparing *wrong*. And if doing what is right be true *Goodneſs*, then God is equally *Good* in both Diſpenſations.

It muſt be owing to very erroneous Ideas of God's Perfections, that He has ever been denied to be a proper Object of his Creatures *Fear*. As to any ſuperſtitious Fear, it is out of the queſtion. But certainly His *Diſpleaſure* is as proper an Object of our *Fear*, as His Favour is of our *Hope*. If it be ſaid, as it has been ſaid, that † *it is Malice and not Goodneſs, which can make us afraid*; the Reader cannot but be pleaſed to find what an excellent Author

* Si nocet, inquit, alicui Deus, jam bonus non eſt. Non exiguo falluntur errore, qui Cenſuram——Divinam acerbitatis & malitiæ nomine infamant, putantes nocentem dici oportere, qui nocentes afficit pœna, &c. *Lactan. De ira Dei, Cap.* 17.

† *Characteriſticks*, Vol. 1. Pag. 39.

has

has lately obſerved in anſwer hereto. * *In reality, Goodneſs is the natural and juſt Object of the greateſt Fear to an ill Man. Malice may be appeaſed or ſatiated; Humour may change: but Goodneſs is a fixed, ſteady, immoveable Principle of Action. If either of the former holds the Sword of Juſtice, there is plainly ground for the greateſt of Crimes to hope for Impunity. But if it be Goodneſs, there can be no poſſible Hope, whilſt the Reaſons of Things, or the Ends of Government, call for Puniſhment.*

I think it appears from what has been ſaid, how little Reaſon there is to wonder at the Introduction of *Natural Evil*. For without enquiring whether it be not an unavoidable Conſequence of our Capacity for *Natural Good*; and without conſidering what *Natural* Ends and Uſes are ſerved by it; it ſeems abundantly ſufficient, that it anſwers the *Moral* Purpoſes above-mentioned. That it is neceſſary for the Exerciſe and *Improvement* of Men's *Virtues*; for the *Correction* of the *Corrigible*, and the *Puniſhment* of *the Incorrigible*. I before obſerved, that to create intelligent Beings without *Liberty*, or to debar them the Uſe of it, would be to ſhut *Virtue* out of the World; and by conſequence, *Happineſs*, in a great meaſure. This Liberty then being abuſed, and *Moral Evil* introduced; *Natural Evil* became not

* *See the Preface to Mr.* Butler's *Sermons*, Pag. 21.

only

only uſeful, but neceſſary. When Men have corrupted their Nature, and plunged themſelves in Sin and Guilt; they will either be reformed, or they will not. If they will not, *Suffering* becomes their Due; their juſt Lot, and unavoidable Portion. If they will, it is commonly owing to *Suffering*; which in all Moral Diſtempers is the ſtrongeſt and moſt prevailing Remedy in the World. And ſince it is thus effectual in reſtoring loſt Men, and bringing them back to their Duty; little Reaſon is there to repine at it; and much leſs to turn it into an Objection againſt Providence. Reaſon informs us, that Men's Wills are not to be forced; and Experience aſſures us that gentle Means are often unavailing. It was neceſſary therefore to have recourſe to this ſharper Expedient; which might, conſiſtently with Liberty, reduce unthinking Sinners, and reconcile them to the Paths of Virtue.

It is chiefly owing to theſe *Natural Evils*, if they may be called ſuch, that this Life is properly *a State of Diſcipline*. The principal Intentions of our All-righteous Governor, are to improve the Virtuous, and reclaim the Vicious; by ſuch ways and means as are ſuited to the Nature of Free-Agents. To theſe Ends the Diſpenſations of His Providence are moſt wiſely adapted. Accordingly Gentleneſs and Severity are ſeparately uſed, or mixed, as Caſes and Occaſions require. But the Evils of Life are ſo uſeful, and beneficial; ſo neceſſary for the Accompliſhment of both theſe Ends; that it is

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no wonder they are ſuffered to prevail and ſpread, as they generally do. The beſt Men ſtand in need of them, not only for the Exerciſe and Improvement of their Virtues, but oftentimes for the Security of their Innocence; and ſometimes for the Cure of ſecret Faults, and latent Corruptions. And as to thoſe who have gone aſtray, and departed further from their Duty; their Return, if they have returned, has generally been owing to the Diſcipline of Suffering. Whoever are not to be wrought upon by this powerful Remedy, may be reckoned incurable, and their Caſe deſperate.

But if this Life be a *State of Diſcipline* in reſpect of the virtuous, or reclaimable Part of Mankind; it is univerſally *a State of Tryal.* It ſeems indeed highly probable, not only that all Men, but all moral Agents whatever, are obliged to undergo ſome kind of Probation. Such a State is, in ſome meaſure, a neceſſary Conſequence of Intelligence and Liberty, in finite and imperfect Beings; unleſs they be ſo ſituated and circumſtanced, as to be out of the Reach of all Temptation. We know that even good Men will hereafter be thus ſecured, notwithſtanding they retain both their Freedom and Fallibility. When *Virtue* and *Pleaſure* ſhall be intirely on the ſame ſide, attracting the Mind with united Force; and nothing on the other ſide to draw againſt them; it is eaſy to conceive, that in ſuch a State there can be no danger of going aſtray. But this is a State of *Reward* and Victory, not of *Tryal* and Conflict.

flict. Nor can any Reaſon be aſſigned, why God ſhould fix his intelligent Creatures in ſuch a Condition as this, at their firſt ſetting out; and before they have done any thing at all to deſerve it, or prepare themſelves for it. It was not fitting they ſhould obtain ſuch a Prize, or be allowed ſuch a Triumph, till they had been found, in ſome Senſe, in ſome Degree, *worthy*. Perfect Happineſs was and ought to be reſerved for the proper Objects of God's Love and Favour; which none of his Creatures could be, without virtuous Qualifications and Moral Merit: and theſe imply a State of *Probation*. Thoſe Servants of his, whether Men or Angels, whoſe *Obedience* and *Fidelity* have been *proved* and *tryed*; are truly amiable in the ſight of God. Theſe are real Objects of his Eſteem and Love; and, as ſuch, are, or will be, juſtly diſtinguiſhed by proportionable Degrees of Happineſs and Glory. To confer the ſame Happineſs on the *Unfaithful* and *Diſobedient*, would be a manifeſt Violation of Truth and Nature; ſince it would be treating thoſe Beings alike, between whom there is the greateſt Difference in the World. By Parity of Reaſon, it was morally unfit to treat thoſe who had never been *tryed*, and by Conſequence merited nothing, in the ſame manner as if they had been tryed, and found faithful. Are

Rewards due to the Righteous, and Puniſhments to the Wicked? Thoſe who have never been tryed, can deſerve neither; and therefore cannot, agreeably to Truth and Rectitude, be treated like either of the other. They are in a Moral Senſe *worthleſs*; and by Conſequence are in a Station as much below *Merit*, as it is above *Demerit*.—To diſcover further the Rectitude and Fitneſs of God's Proceedings in relation to His Creatures; let us endeavour to illuſtrate this Matter by a Similitude taken from the low Concerns of human Life. Let us ſuppoſe, under any wiſe Maſter of a Family, three Servants thus differently qualified and circumſtanced: One of them has approved himſelf by long-tryed Fidelity, Diligence, and Diſcretion; another has been found falſe, perfidious and ſlothful; and a third is newly entered into Service, and as yet untryed: Would not this laſt be dealt with in a quite different Manner from either the firſt or the ſecond? that is, in a middle Way between the Affection ſhewn to the one, and the Rigour uſed toward the other? His Maſter would treat him with Humanity, give him all fitting Encouragement, and let him want nothing that he could reaſonably expect. But ſurely that Eſteem, that Good-Will and Kindneſs which was ſhewn to

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the tryed Merit of the firſt, would not be ſhewn to the third, till he had been tryed likewiſe. To ſuppoſe otherwiſe, is to ſuppoſe that a wiſe Man either could not, or would not, diſtinguiſh between experienced Worth, and Qualities untryed. It is to ſuppoſe, that a Courſe of faithful Services, and dutiful Behaviour, ſtand for nothing, and are of no Value at all.——The Univerſe is God's Family, and Moral Agents are his Servants; who obtain His Favour, or incur His Diſpleaſure, according as they demean themſelves. He has given them to underſtand what He expects from them, and what they may expect from Him, either in Caſe of Obedience, or Diſobedience. And tho' they are utterly incapable of doing Him any real Service, and in that reſpect are all *unprofitable Servants*; yet foraſmuch as Obedience and Virtue, perfect or imperfect, are in themſelves proportionably amiable and good, and Diſobedience and Vice the contrary; God approves, or diſapproves, accordingly. Even Men are enabled to recommend themſelves, and find Favour in His Sight; and, through the Merits of their Redeemer, their faithful Endeavours, however imperfect, are *counted to them for Righteouſneſs*.

Here perhaps it may be objected, That the *Divine Preſcience* ſeems to ſuperſede

all *Tryals*, and render them wholly needleſs. To what purpoſe does God fix his Creatures in ſuch a State, if he ever foreknew the Behaviour of them all, even to the minuteſt Action? I anſwer, that ſuch a Foreknowledge implies the Reality of thoſe Actions which are the Objects of it; ſince it is impoſſible to foreknow what is never to be.——But as God is *omniſcient* as well as *preſcient*, muſt we not conclude that He clearly ſees, not only whatever *will* actually be, but whatever *would* be upon every Suppoſition? And if He certainly knows how any of His Creatures would behave themſelves in any imaginable State; what Occaſion can there be for the Production of ſuch a State, or any farther Tryal? In anſwer to this, I obſerve in the firſt Place, that no Knowledge whatever does, or can, make any Alteration in the Objects thereof. For all Knowledge is Perception; and Perception being no Action, nothing can be effected by it. If then no Creature can deſerve either well or ill at the hands of his Creator till he come to exerciſe his Liberty or free Choice; the Omniſcience of the Deity cannot make him, in any Degree, either meritorious, or guilty. Whatever may be known, or foreknown; no Merit or Demerit can be antecedent to Choice and Action. God knows

knows that a certain Creature will, or would, if left to his Liberty, and put to the Teſt; behave wiſely and well. What follows from hence? Does it follow, that the Merit of ſuch a Conduct, or ſuch an Agent, is antecedent to his *Tryal?* If it does, then it will follow, that it was antecedent to his *Exiſtence*; ſince an Agent may as well be ſuppoſed to merit before he exiſts, as before he acts. The Divine Knowledge precedes both, but operates no way. It cannot therefore ſuperſede actual *Probation*; without which no Creature can really deſerve any Thing.——I would further ask, whether it be *right*, and reaſonable, to *puniſh* the foreſeen *Crimes* of any Agent before they be committed. If it be right, then our firſt Parents ſhould never have entered into Paradiſe; or if they did enter, their Sentence might as well have been paſſed and executed before the Fall, as after it. If it be not right to *puniſh* foreſeen *Crimes* before they be committed; how can it be right, to *reward* foreſeen *Virtues* before they be practiſed, or acquired? If no Agent can contract Guilt, or deſerve *Puniſhment*, before he have done amiſs; neither can any Agent deſerve Favour or *Reward*, till he have done well. He may enjoy Degrees of Good, and partake of the Bleſſings of Heaven, antecedently

ly to any Merit, or any Tryal; but that ſupreme Felicity, that indefectible State, wherein conſiſt the Rewards of the Righteous, could not, I ſuppoſe, conſiſtently with the *Divine Rectitude*, have been conferred on any *untryed* Creatures. This is their peculiar Portion, partly by God's Appointment, and partly from the very Nature of the Thing.——For, in the laſt place, ſince a State of Probation is neceſſary for the Exerciſe and Improvement of Virtue; it is, by Conſequence, neceſſary for the Conſummation and Perfection of Happineſs. As the Favour of God, and the poſitive Rewards conſequent thereupon, were not to be obtained without Virtue; nor Virtue without Tryal: ſo the ſame may be ſaid of the *Natural Effects* of Virtue; which, as I before obſerved, are eſſential to the Happineſs of all Rational Beings. Virtue is properly the Health of the Mind; and no Pleaſures whatever can be ſound or ſincere without it. To which muſt be added, that it yields Pleaſures of its own more valuable than all other Things can poſſibly afford. Whatever therefore is requiſite to the Production, Encreaſe, or Exaltation of Virtue, may be looked upon as the Foundation of Happineſs. And from hence it appears, how unreaſonable it is to complain either of a *State of Tryal* in gene-

general, or of thoſe *Natural Evils* in particular, which belong to it.

And if this Life is to be conſider'd as *a State of Tryal*, and Preparation for another; it cannot be difficult to account for *the promiſcuous Diſpenſation of Good and Evil* which appears in it. This was indeed formerly reckoned the principal Difficulty concerning *Providence*; inſomuch that many wiſe and good Men ſtumbled at it, and very hardly recovered themſelves. But the Reaſon was, becauſe *a Future State* was then, in a great meaſure, undiſcovered. And indeed if the Exiſtence of Mankind terminated with this preſent Life; it would not only be difficult, but impoſſible to explain this Matter, or reconcile it with the Rectitude of the Divine Adminiſtration. On the other hand, ſince we have been aſſured of another Life, the preſent Order and Diſtribution of Things is no longer a Myſtery. There is nothing in it that needs to diſquiet or perplex our Minds; nothing that is unſuitable to our Condition and Circumſtances. The very Irregularities complained of, only ſeem to be ſuch; and are, in themſelves, perfectly right and fit. Whatever Objections may be drawn from them, they all admit of an eaſy Solution, if we do but attend to this important Truth; *viz.* Tryal and Diſcipline are our Buſineſs in this

this World; Judgment and Retribution are reſerved for the next.

But whatever be the Force of this general Reaſon, there may be alſo particular Reaſons for the Diſpenſations we are ſpeaking of, ariſing from the different Circumſtances of Mankind. And if there be, they cannot fail to be regarded by the righteous Governor of the World; whom I have all along conſidered as directing his Proceedings by the entire Reaſons of Things. We cannot but obſerve, that there is an endleſs Variety of Caſes among Mankind, who differ ſo much in their Conſtitutions, Inclinations, Cuſtoms, and Ways of Life; that both their Virtues and Vices are almoſt infinitely diverſified: inſomuch that it may be juſtly queſtioned, whether any two Caſes be exactly alike; or any two Men admit of the ſame Providential Treatment. Here then is a Labyrinth in which our weak Minds are eaſily loſt. No Man living throughly underſtands the Caſe of any one Individual in the whole Species; not excepting even his own. How then ſhould we preſume to judge of the Diſpenſations of Providence? Every Man is dealt with ſuitably, and fitly, and according to *the Right of his Caſe*: and the Right of his Caſe is compounded of various *Reaſons*, ſome paſt, ſome preſent, and

ſome future; ſome reſpecting himſelf, and others his Fellow-Creatures. We are ſo far from diſcovering all theſe Reaſons, that perhaps we ſee none of them. To determine therefore what Means and Methods are proper to be uſed, in relation to our ſelves, and the World about us, is as much out of our power, as to count the Rays of the Sun, or the Sands on the Sea-Shore.

But tho' we can form no Judgment concerning Individuals, nor find out what particular Diſpenſations are moſt ſuitable to their reſpective Caſes; yet if we conſider the preſent and future State of Mankind, and the Relation which the one bears to the other; we may eaſily diſcover what is ſufficient to ſatisfy our Minds, either about the *Sufferings* of the *Righteous*, or the *Proſperities* of the *Wicked*.

——Suppoſing then that the *Righteous* here ſpoken of, are, according to the Meaſures of Humanity, really ſuch; tho' this is a Point not always ſo clear, nor ſo eaſy to be determined, as is commonly imagined: but ſuppoſing them, I ſay, really to be, what they are reputed; yet it may ſometimes be very fit for them to ſuffer in this Life. Some Reaſons for it are very obvious; and many others there may be which we cannot diſcover. It

has been already obſerved, that *Sufferings* do in many Reſpects befriend *Virtue*. That they afford many Occaſions for the Exerciſe of it, and many Opportunities for its Growth and Improvement. To which muſt be added, that by producing many illuſtrious Examples of Patience, Fortitude, and Submiſſion; they place Virtue in a moſt amiable Light; and thereby contribute to recommend it to the Public, and propagate it among Mankind. Were this Life a Scene either of uninterrupted *Enjoyments*, or continual *Sufferings*; many Virtues muſt have lain dormant, or rather unproduced, through the Want of Objects and Opportunities. But that juſt Mixture which Providence has ordained; enlarges Mens Sphere of Action, and calls forth every Virtue. They have hereby room to employ all their Affections, and exert all their Powers. Nothing therefore could be more ſuitable to our preſent State of Diſcipline and Tryal, than thoſe very Diſpenſations which we are conſidering.— Again, the Sufferings of the Righteous are to be conſidered likewiſe as *Correctives*. The beſt Men have their Faults and Failings; which not only blemiſh their Characters, but injure their Minds. In proportion as their Virtue is obſtructed by them, their Happineſs muſt be diminiſhed.

ſhed. This therefore is another juſt Reaſon for the Interpoſition of Providence, in any ſuch Manner as might be moſt effectual. Good Men are peculiarly the Objects of God's Care and Concern; who will therefore omit nothing, conſiſtently with Liberty, that may contribute to their greater Purity and Perfection. Frail as they are, they are the Top of Mankind, and the Flower of our Species; and as ſuch, Providence may be ſuppoſed, as it were, ſollicitous in their Behalf; and particularly engaged in cleanſing their Minds, and rooting out the Remains of Sin and Corruption. And what Expedient ſo proper for this Purpoſe as *Affliction* and *Adverſity?* Nothing ſearches deeper; nothing produces greater Attention, or more careful Recollection; nothing tends more to purify Mens Affections, or to bring the whole Mind to a right Frame. Thus, for Inſtance, that Attachment to Senſe, and the Enjoyments of this World, which is often too ſtrong even in the beſt Men, is no way ſo effectually looſened as by *ſuffering*. This recalls, and fixes, their devious Thoughts, and wandering Deſires; and puts them upon reflecting, in a more particular manner, where they are, and whither they are going. It greatly contributes to remove Mens Hearts and Affec-

tions from *Things below*, and raiſe them to *Things above*: to convince them of the Vanities of this Life, and make them earneſt and unwearied in the Purſuit of a better.——But further, theſe Demerits of good Men which require theſe Providential *Corrections*, render them alſo obnoxious to real *Puniſhment*. They are *Sufferers* becauſe they are *Sinners*: And this is another Reaſon, diſtinct from the former, for the Hardſhips and Adverſities which are brought upon them. As all Men have ſinned, and fallen ſhort of their Duty, they muſt all be liable to Puniſhment; which may at any time be inflicted on them within the Bounds of Proportion. Every Inſtance, every Degree of Sin is a juſt Ground for ſuitable Puniſhment, whether the Ends and Intentions of Government require it or no. The Virtues of good Men may not always indemnify them here; however they may contribute to ſecure them hereafter. But is not the Great, the Univerſal Sacrifice abundantly ſufficient to anſwer both theſe Purpoſes? To avert entirely the Indignation of Heaven, and purchaſe an Exemption from all Puniſhment. This can only be ſaid of thoſe who punctually comply with the Terms of the Goſpel, and diſcharge the Duties required of them. Now,

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there may be even in good Chriſtians, in reſpect of theſe Goſpel-Conditions, leſſer Failures and Deficiencies; which may affect them in this Life, tho' not in the next: which may deſerve, and therefore juſtify, the Judgments of Heaven, and the Animadverſions of Providence. In ſhort, whatever Favour and Acceptance they may find in a Future State, they may not wholly eſcape at preſent. On the contrary, they may juſtly be puniſhed; and ſuch a Proceeding is perfectly agreeable to the Reaſons of Things, and the Truth of their Caſe. Since their Virtues and Graces greatly over-ballance their Defects; ſince they are faithful and obedient in the main, tho' they *offend in many Things*: this fully accounts both for their Sufferings here, and their Succeſs hereafter.

I am next to conſider *the Proſperity of the Wicked*. And here again I muſt obſerve, that in ſome Caſes, it may be difficult to determine who are *wicked*; and ſtill more difficult to determine what is *Proſperity*. Suppoſing a Man to be notoriouſly *wicked*, how can we certainly know when he is *proſperous?* Tho' he abound in the Goods and Enjoyments of Life, they may, to him, be very inſipid, and by conſequence avail nothing. His Mind may be ſo diſordered, and diſturbed,

turbed, that he cannot reliſh them. In the midſt of the greateſt Affluence, he may have ſuch ſecret Pangs and Anxieties, as render him a Burden and a Torment to himſelf. But ſuppoſing it otherwiſe, and that he does enjoy the Goods in his Poſſeſſion; they may be far from amounting to any real Proſperity. If they ſooth him in his Sins, and harden him in his Wickedneſs, they are, in effect, not Bleſſings, but Judgments; and may be conſidered as the beginning of his Puniſhment. Either a wicked Man is capable of being reclaimed by the Favours and Bounties of Providence, or he is not; if he be, the *Reaſon* of his *Proſperity* is plain, and ſurely we need not ſeek for any other. If he be not, he neither does, nor can *proſper*, whatever he poſſeſſes. All his Goods, and all his Enjoyments, are only ſo many gilded Misfortunes; ſince they add to his Guilt, and haſten his Ruin. On Men of incorrigible and reprobate Minds, Proſperity is not *conferred* by Providence, but judicially *inflicted*. It is, to them, a Snare, a Deluſion; which by blinding their Underſtandings, and fettering their Inclinations, renders their Caſe the more deſperate. In reality therefore, it is not, in reſpect of ſuch Men, a gentle Diſpenſation,

ſation, but a very ſevere one. It may juſtly be conſidered as a part of their Puniſhment, and a Prelude to their Deſtruction. ——— However, tho' the Proſperity of ſuch Men be really, and in the Iſſue of Things, calamitous and penal; yet ſtill it implies at preſent ſome Kinds and Degrees of Enjoyment. Perhaps then it may be asked, what Connexion or Congruity there is between Guilt and Pleaſure? How it is conſiſtent with the Rectitude of the Deity, conſidered as Governor of the World, to diſpenſe any ſort of Good to obſtinate and incurable Offenders? Not to repeat the Reaſon already given for ſuch Diſpenſations; I anſwer, that as no Man is ſo virtuous as never to do amiſs; ſo no Man is ſo vicious as never to do well. It is not to be imagined, that all the Actions of his Life ſhould be a continued Series of Tranſgreſſions. Some Parts, ſome Inſtances of his Conduct muſt be ſuppoſed laudable, and in a lower Degree virtuous. Tho' therefore his Vices, being greatly predominant, expoſe him to the Indignation of Heaven; and will, if continued in, involve him in great Miſeries *hereafter*; yet why may not ſome Indulgence, ſome Favour be ſhewn him *here*, on account of that Good which he

he is ſuppoſed to have done? If he have any Virtue, any good Quality, any commendable Actions; why may they not, abſtracting all other Conſiderations, be ſo far regarded, as to procure him that Shadow of Proſperity which we are here ſpeaking of? A Proſperity that only affords him a few broken Pleaſures, and tranſient Enjoyments; which amuſe him for a little while, and then vaniſh for ever.

Beſides theſe Reaſons for the Sufferings of the Righteous, and the Proſperity of the Wicked, which are peculiar to each; others may be aſſigned that are common to them both. Neither perhaps may be ſent on any perſonal Account; but be entirely owing to ſome ſocial Relation. The Righteous may ſuffer, and the Wicked proſper, meerly through the Merits or Demerits of their Parents, their Princes, or the Community to which they belong. Thus we find in Fact, that good Men are often involved in public or domeſtic Calamities; and ill Men often included in Bleſſings obtained by other Hands. This is ſometimes an unavoidable Conſequence of the preſent Frame and Conſtitution of Things; and when it befalls Men by Divine Appointment, wiſe and good Ends

are promoted by it; as might be ſhewn at large.

Again, it deſerves to be more eſpecially conſidered, that if Men's Virtues and good Actions were immediately rewarded, and their Vices and Crimes immediately punniſhed; if this, I ſay, was the general and ſtated Rule of Providential Diſpenſations; ſuch a Weight would be laid upon Men's Wills, as would leave little or no room for a Moral Choice, and by conſequence for Virtue. What Man would dare to commit a vile or vicious Action, if he was ſure that a Judgment from Heaven was to be the immediate Conſequence? If the Sword of Juſtice hung viſibly over his Head, ready to fall upon him the very next Inſtant? If Mankind were over-awed by ſuch a powerful Check, ſuch an irreſiſtible Reſtraint as this; the Commiſſion of a Crime would be almoſt impracticable. On the other hand, if virtuous Actions brought a Providential Recompenſe along with them; Men would greedily run into them meerly from a Principle of Intereſt. Human Virtue would then be entirely mercenary, and thoſe pure Motives, whereon its Worth chiefly depends, quite out of ſight. In ſhort, ſuch a Suppoſition is utterly inconſiſtent with a State of Tryal; as

bringing Men under a Moral *Neceſſity* of diſcharging their Duty. ——— Thus we ſee, thoſe *promiſcuous Diſpenſations* which appear in the World, are not only conſiſtent with the *Divine Rectitude*, but perfectly agreeable to it; as being grounded on the true Reaſons of Things, and reſulting from the Nature of Virtue and Vice, and the Frame and Faculties of Human Minds.

I know not whether it be needful to take notice of the Objection which is ſometimes raiſed from the *Inequality of Men's Conditions* in this Life. The Reaſons of it are ſo obvious; or, rather, it is ſo manifeſtly neceſſary for the Well-being, and perhaps the very Being of Society, that any Man may ſoon ſatisfy his *Underſtanding* about it, whatever trouble he may find in ſilencing his *Paſſions*. Nothing is more evident, than that if Mankind were reduced to an Equality, and ſet upon a Level; the Affairs of the World would either ſtand ſtill, or run into the utmoſt Confuſion. ———But ſuppoſing it a Matter indifferent to Society, whether the Conditions of Men were equal or unequal; there is good Reaſon to believe that the preſent Inequality would ſtill have prevailed upon

on other Accounts. As the *Order* and the Harmony of the World require a Variety and Subordination of *Kinds*, ſo the ſame may be ſaid in reſpect of *Individuals*. In both Caſes, ſuch a Subordination is intrinſically more regular and beautiful; and, by conſequence, contributes to the Perfection of the Univerſe.——— It promotes likewiſe *Moral Good*, by affording ſuch Occaſions of exerciſing Men's Virtues, and improving their Minds, as could not have been had without it. Moderation, Contentment, Humility, and the like Virtues, depend in a great meaſure on theſe Inequalities of Men's Fortunes and Conditions; which may therefore be looked upon not only as requiſite, but eſſential to a State of Probation.——— Such an Appointment then is highly becoming the Wiſdom of Divine Providence; I mean, as far as Providence is concerned in this Matter. For in truth, many Events relating to it are only permitted, not ordained. Men often diverſify their Conditions themſelves; and differ more from each other in the Externals of Life, than Providence ever intended. Some throw themſelves from a high Station to a low one, by Folly and Miſconduct: others climb the Heights of Ambition,

by Ways and Paths of their own making. And thus the Diſtinctions of Life are multiplied, and widened, merely thro' Men's vicious Deſires, and criminal Purſuits. Providence ſuffers theſe Revolutions, but determines them not; and therefore is not anſwerable for them, or the Conſequences of them. And indeed not only theſe Differences of Condition, but many of the Hardſhips and Diſtreſſes which befall Mankind, are the Fruits of their own Folly; and ſhould be placed to the Account, not of Divine Providence, but Human Perverſeneſs. However, a regular Subordination being right, fit, and amiable in itſelf, may well be conſidered as God's Ordinance; who has made evident Proviſion for it in that Diverſity of Talents and Natural Endowments which appears throughout our whole Species. The original Diſparities of their Minds naturally tend to produce different Circumſtances and Conditions of Life.——But it may not be improper to add, that theſe Diſtinctions are far leſs material than is commonly imagined. In reſpect of the moſt valuable Enjoyments, and the principal Bleſſings of Life, Men are nearly equal. The Advantages and Privileges of the Great have more Shew than Subſtance;

ſtance; and depend very much on Fancy and Opinion. Thoſe Gratifications which are peculiar to them, are often very much encumbered; often purchaſed at the Price of more ſolid Satisfactions. Happineſs is ſo far from being in Proportion to Greatneſs, that many Men, when they riſe in the World, leave it behind them. They frequently exchange natural Appetites, and natural Enjoyments, for artificial ones; which having no Bounds but thoſe of Imagination, Men are eaſily bewildered in the purſuit of them. While they are graſping at fantaſtic Objects, they overlook real ones; and thus catch nothing in the End but Vanity and Vexation. What is commonly ſaid of the Covetous, may be juſtly applied, tho' in a different Senſe, to many Men in the upper Stations of Life; the more they poſſeſs, the leſs they enjoy. In ſhort, all things conſidered, there is good Reaſon to conclude, that the Inequality of Men's Conditions in this World is far greater in Appearance, than it is in Reality.

Having thus briefly conſidered, in the Light wherein I propoſed, the Doctrines of CREATION and PROVIDENCE; I ſhould

ſhould now proceed to thoſe of REDEMPTION and a FUTURE STATE. But theſe Papers having already ſwelled beyond their intended Bulk, I ſhall omit this Part of my Deſign, or defer it to ſome other Opportunity.

FINIS.

BOOKS printed for JOHN PEMBERTON, *at the* Buck *againſt St.* Dunſtan's *Church*, Fleetſtreet.

1. A Letter to a *Deiſt*, concerning the Beauty and Excellency of Moral Virtue, and the Support and Improvement which it receives from the Chriſtian Revelation. The Second Edition. To which is added, A *Poſtſcript*.

Eas habere Vires Virtutem, tantumqe in omni re valere, quantum veteres Philoſophi crediderunt; nemo Sanus affirmaverit. Eraſmus.

2. The FOUNDATION of Moral Goodneſs; or a further Enquiry into the Original of our Idea of Virtue.

Eſt quidem vera lex, recta ratio naturæ congruens, diffuſa in omnes, conſtans, ſempiterna. Cicero.

3. The Second Part of the FOUNDATION of Moral Goodneſs; illuſtrating and enforcing the *Principles* and *Reaſonings* contained in the former: Being an Anſwer to certain Remarks communicated by a Gentleman to the Author.

Virtus eſt altiſſimis defixa radicibus. Cicero.

N. B. *Theſe three were written by the Author of*, Divine Rectitude; or, a Brief Enquiry concerning the Moral Perfections of the Deity; particularly in reſpect of Creation and Providence.

4. The Uſe and Intent of Prophecy, in the ſeveral Ages of the World: In [illegible]courſes, delivered at the *Temple*-Church, in [illegible] and *May* 1724. Publiſhed at the Deſire of the Maſters of the Bench of the two Honourable Societies. To which are added, Three Diſſertations. I. The Authority of the Second Epiſtle of St. *Peter*. II. The Senſe of the Antients before Chriſt, upon the